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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 14, 2011

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Crime Victims, Good Samaritans and Advocacy Groups Honored at Event Marking National Crime Victims' Rights Week - U.S. Attorney Machen Cites Bravery of Victims, Survivors -

WASHINGTON - U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. and the members of the U.S. Attorney's Office's Victim Witness Assistance Unit hosted a ceremony today that paid tribute to crime victims, their families, witnesses and advocates for showing extraordinary courage, strength and perseverance in the pursuit of justice.

The event, held at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, was part of the annual observance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This year's national theme, "Reshaping the Future, Honoring the Past," recognizes that every day, crime victims bravely face the task of reshaping their lives after victimization. The theme also highlights the importance of honoring the many people and organizations that have fought for heightened awareness of victims' issues and secured increased participation of victims in the criminal justice process.

In addition to U.S. Attorney Machen, speakers at today's ceremony included Associate Attorney General Thomas J. Perrelli and Patsy Spier, outreach specialist for the Department of Justice's Office of Justice for Victims of Overseas Terrorism. In 2002, while working with her husband as a school teacher in Indonesia, Ms. Spier survived an armed attack in which her husband and two of her teaching colleagues were killed.

"One of the most humbling aspects of my job is meeting victims and survivors who have shown remarkable courage in the aftermath of crime," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "The brave mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who find the strength to move on and become advocates for a better tomorrow never cease to amaze and inspire me."

"Through the Defending Childhood initiative, the Department of Justice is focused on implementing concrete knowledge to combat children's exposure to violence," said Associate Attorney General Perrelli. "The Department and residents of Washington, D.C. are fortunate to benefit from the leadership of U.S. Attorney Ron Machen and his dedicated Victim Witness Assistance Unit, who work heroically to advance victims' rights, defend our youngest members of the community, and pursue justice."

The Defending Childhood Initiative is a multi-year nationwide effort to prevent children's exposure to violence as victims and witnesses, mitigate the negative effects experienced by children exposed to violence, and develop knowledge about and increase awareness of this issue.

Today's ceremony included awards for several individual victims and Good Samaritans whose efforts furthered the cause of justice. For example, the honorees included Julia Dunkins, the founder of Survivors of Homicide, an organization that has been a source of help and comfort to thousands of families suffering the pain of a homicide. Ms. Dunkins, whose son was murdered in the District of Columbia in 1993, was recognized with a "Good Samaritan Award."

The program also recognized the work of Torch of Hope, Inc., an organization that was formed by Christine Jackson, Phillip Jackson and Delilah Kelly, the parents and aunt of 18-year-old Phillip Jackson, Jr., who lost his life to gun violence in the District of Columbia in September 2008. Torch of Hope helps victims and survivors of crime as they go through the grieving process, by providing them with counseling referrals, life-skills assistance, and support.

The event was developed and organized by the Victim Witness Assistance Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. Members of the Unit provide essential services and support to victims and witnesses, such as making referrals for counseling, addressing safety concerns, assisting with access to Crime Victim Compensation Program funds, and accompanying victims to court proceedings. The Unit also notifies victims of their rights and provides information regarding significant case events, such as the filing of charges, plea hearings, trials and sentencing hearings.

Further information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week is available at <http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw/>.